

Court Cultures in the Muslim World

Seventh to nineteenth centuries

Edited by Albrecht Fuess and
Jan-Peter Hartung

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List of figures List of Contributors

x
xiii

Introduction

ALBRECHT FUESS AND JAN-PETER HARTUNG

1

PART I Politics

The Prophet and the early Caliphates

1 Did the Prophet Muhammad keep court?

MICHAEL COOK

23

2 The representation of the early Islamic Empire and its religion on coin imagery

STEFAN HEIDEMANN

30

3 Great estates and elite lifestyles in the Fertile Crescent from Byzantium and Sasanian Iran to Islam

HUGH KENNEDY

54

4 Court and courtiers: A preliminary investigation of Abbasid terminology

NADIA MARIA EL CHEIKH

80

Muslim court cultures of the Middle Ages

91

5 Redressing injustice: *Maqālim* jurisdictions at the Umayyad court of Córdoba (eighth–eleventh centuries CE)

CHRISTIAN MÜLLER

93

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7 Courts, capitals and kingship Delhi and its sultans in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE

Sunil Kumar

The Arab intellectual Ibn Khaldūn (d. 806/1406) had remarked on the close connection between the fortunes of a dynasty and the city. The scholar had linked the civilizational glory of a city, the political compulsion to endow it with great architectural marvels, and the gradual ebb in its fortunes to his cyclical theory of the rise and decline of states and the waxing and waning of the 'asabiyya, the group solidarity of the ruling classes. In his interpretation, as political incumbents were replaced by parvenu adventurers with greater political cohesion, they scripted their seizure of power with great monumental constructions honouring their achievements.¹

Although few intellectuals of his time were able to theorize on the political conditions of their age with equal facility, some of Ibn Khaldūn's more narrow observations regarding the extreme temporality of political authority were also present in the writings of the courier of the Delhi sultans, Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī (d. c. 761/1360), himself a victim of regime-change. Unlike Ibn Khaldūn's sociology, Baranī's reading of statecraft was conceptualized within a juridical vocabulary and articulated as a didactic text on political conduct.² Not surprisingly, therefore, he gave a scathing review of the vanity of Sultana rulers in their search for self-glorification and absolutist rule.³ But equally, the pragmatism of the courier was also on display: Baranī grudgingly acknowledged the need to accommodate administrative *non-sharī'atī* laws and courtly behaviour for the security and prosperity of the Muslim community.⁴ Absolutist rule and its accoutrements, the display of authority through monumental architecture and the pomp of courtly ceremony were evils that Muslims had to therefore accept in an imperfect world.⁵ This was a double-edged sword: in Baranī's reasoning the traditions of absolutist governance followed by Delhi sultans were derived from Iran, a land that also produced many positive principles of social ordering and urbane conduct. These were, however, disassociated in his mind from its traditions of governance: the conduct of its rulers, the "Khusravan", should be emulated only in their pursuit of justice, not in their practice of despotic power.⁶

If we read Ibn Khaldūn and Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī together, it is possible to isolate three characteristics of Sultana governance: an insecure political environment marked by the cyclical rise and fall of dynasties; a Persianate model of absolute kingship with its attendant rituals that were de rigueur for the practice

of monarchical rule; and an Islamic paradigm that recognized the sovereignty of God and was hence critical of kings and their pretensions of absolute temporal authority. The problem with this characterization, of course, is its extreme generalization—it could apply equally well to nearly all Sultanate regimes located in the Persianate milieu without developing any one of their salient characteristics. In this paper I use this general template as a point of analytical departure for a more infected study of the political traditions and courtly practices of the Delhi sultans.

The first three sections of my paper focus on the turbulent political history of the Delhi sultans and their massive architectural constructions in Delhi. Most historians have followed colonial historiography in reading Sultanate construction of capitals, palaces and mosques as a statement of power and authority (by wasteful despots) over vanquished foes.⁷ Additionally, this huge amount of construction activity was also interpreted as striking evidence of the material resources available to the Delhi sultans—a visible testament of their ability to hire skilled craftsmen, mobilize slaves and forced labour, employ new technologies to expedite construction and use their military might to seize raw materials.⁸ Shortage of water, an increase in population and a search for security were also reasons provided for the frequent shifts in royal residences.⁹

Although this historiography is perfectly correct in pointing out that thirteenth century Sultanate Delhi was hardly an “organic” city, my analysis shifts the ground to relate the hectic construction and transferring of capitals not just to the inspiration of the sultans of Delhi but as a response to the challenges posed by the political conditions of their age. As newly enthroned monarchs sought to consolidate their authority through the recruitment and deployment of military personnel, there was an urgent need to “house” the new political dispensation as well. In other words, in the competitive politics of the thirteenth and fourteenth century CE, any effort at consolidating authority implied both the deployment of a military cadre loyal to the new monarch and an ambitious building programme where the newly constituted court could assemble. By correlating construction activity with the turbulent politics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, I argue that it is possible to notice how the reproduction of new capitals and courts in the Delhi region was not just a part of the period’s cultural expectations; it was a necessity dictated by the ways in which society and politics were structured at this time. Since it would be impossible for me to cover the two centuries within the confines of this paper I have restricted my study to specific examples until the beginning of the fourteenth century CE and the dynastic change that brought the Tughluqs to power.

The last section of my paper revisits the turbulent politics of the Delhi Sultanate in a slightly different way. It focuses on the transitions in the composition of Sultanate elites and the impact this might have had on political culture and courtly rituals. Conventionally, change in the Delhi Sultanate is not a subject studied by many historians, past or present. Delhi sultans were either good and strong or bad and weak monarchs. Their personal qualities were further grafted onto larger civilizational templates to ascertain how Muslim (or not) they were. In an attempt to break out of this subjective evaluation of individual monarchs and

an inherently synchronic reading of Islam and Sultanate history, I focus on a period of dynastic change and the establishment of the Khalajī and Tughluq regimes. Although we know that the founders of these regimes had their origins as political adventurers in the marches of Afghanistan, we actually have very little information about their social backgrounds. Other than the political stress caused by regime-change, I try to identify whether the arrival of new military personnel from the frontier marches brought any cultural or social change in the life of the court and the capital. To elaborate on this point, I study an unusual accession episode from the Khalajī dynasty and a political ritual from the Tughluqs. Although the events and ceremonies that I discuss were obviously a part of public discussion and the rituals were integral in the making of monarchical charisma, the significance of these traditions was completely elided in the homogenizing impulse present in the Persian chronicles.

It is hardly surprising that this homogenization led many scholars to unreflectively describe the Delhi Sultanate as a Muslim state. The monolithic character ascribed to it by Persian chroniclers was uncritically accepted and a linear history of “Persianization” extended to incorporate the diffusion of Islam in the sub-continent.¹⁰ As I try to bring out in this paper however, the turbulent politics of migrations, dynastic changes and rebellions, which were an intrinsic part of the political history of the thirteenth and fourteenth century Sultanate, need to be read back into the social processes of constituting and reconstituting Muslim identities and structures of governance. Through a study of the politics involved in the construction of the capitals of the Delhi sultans and the traditions of accession and royal pageantry I have tried to recreate the fragile political world of the early Delhi Sultanate when a slave or a humble frontier commander could become king. I am also interested in assessing the narratives of the urbane litterateurs in Delhi for their descriptions of a world that was so distant from their ideal—a world fraught with violence and instability where “royalty” was not the creation of a patrician, aristocratic class, but was seized by humble warriors of plebeian origin.

In my attempt to access this world, I begin my paper by introducing readers to the various courts and capitals constructed in Delhi in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE, and correlating the spatial dispersal of these capitals with the changes in the political dispensations of the various sultans.

Sultanate capitals in the Plain of Delhi

We have few details about the nature of the pre-Sultanate city of Delhi or its political, cultural and economic life. Delhi was the capital of the Tomara Rajputs in the eleventh century CE and a frontier outpost of the Chauhāns in the twelfth. At this time, Delhi’s commercial importance certainly enhanced its significance in the region. It housed an indeterminate number of Jain merchants, wealthy enough to construct several small stone temples in the neighbourhood.¹¹ The commercial importance of the city is also suggested by the presence of a mint and the base billon coin, the *dihirvālī*, which had a very wide circulatory ambit and was eponymously known after the city.¹²

At the turn of the twelfth century CE, the army of sultan Mu'izz al-Dīn Ghawrī (r. 1173–1206 CE) of the Shansabandī dynasty of Ghūr captured Delhi, but it was not until the mid-1220s that Shams al-Dīn Iltutmish (r. 1210–36 CE) established the paramount authority of the city over distant areas of north India. Through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, successive sultans constructed their capitals on a triangular-shaped riverine plain, bounded on the east by the River Yamuna and on the north-west, west and south by the outlying spurs of the Aravalli hills. The table below lists the Sultanate capitals constructed on the riverine plain during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The first Sultanate capital was constructed around the old Tomara-Chauhān fort on the south-west edge of this plain and referred to as "Dihlī" in the Persian chronicles of the thirteenth century CE. Later sultans also constructed their capitals on the riverine plain and these settlements included Kīlōkhīrī, Sīrī, Tughluqābād, 'Adīlābād, Jahānpānāh and Fīrūzābād. Medieval chronicles sometimes used "Dihlī", the name of the first city, quite generically for any or all of the later Sultanate capitals.¹³ To distinguish the first Sultanate capital from the subsequent settlements, I have always referred to it as "Dihlī-yī kuhnaḥ", literally "Old Delhi", a term coined for the first city in the beginning of the fifteenth century by the Timurid chronicler Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī (d. 858/1454).¹⁴

The table provides sufficient information to correlate the frequent shifting of the Sultanate capital to moments of great political stress and conflict among the

THE CAPITALS OF THE DELHI SULTANS, circa 1206–1388 CE

| <i>Regnal years</i> | <i>Name of monarch</i> | <i>Name of capital</i> |
|---------------------|--------------------------|--|
| 1206–10 | Qub al-Dīn Aḡ-Beg | Lahore* |
| 1210 | Ārām Shāh | Lahore* |
| 1210–36 | Iltutmish | Dihlī-yī kuhnaḥ ("Old [city of] Delhi") |
| 1236 | Rukn al-Dīn Fīrūz | Kīlōkhīrī |
| 1236–40 | Raziyah al-Dīn | Dihlī-yī kuhnaḥ |
| 1240–2 | Bahram Shāh | Dihlī-yī kuhnaḥ |
| 1242–6 | 'Alā' al-Dīn Mas'ūd Shāh | Dihlī-yī kuhnaḥ |
| 1246–66 | Nāṣir al-Dīn Mahmūd | Dihlī-yī kuhnaḥ |
| 1266–87 | Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Balbān | Dihlī-yī kuhnaḥ |
| 1287–90 | Mu'izz al-Dīn Kayqubād | Dihlī-yī kuhnaḥ ? > Kīlōkhīrī |
| 1290–96 | Fīrūz Shāh Khalajī | Dihlī-yī kuhnaḥ ? > Sīrī |
| 1296–1316 | 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī | Sīrī |
| 1316–20 | Qub al-Dīn Mubārak | Sīrī |
| 1320 | Khusraw Khān Barwan | Sīrī |
| 1320–24 | Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Tughluq | Sīrī > Tughluqābād |
| 1324–51 | Muḥammad Tughluq | Tughluqābād ? > 'Adīlābād ? > Dihlī-yī kuhnaḥ ? > Jahānpānāh ? |
| 1351–88 | Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq | Jahānpānāh ? > Fīrūzābād |

(*) denotes capitals outside the riverine plain of Delhi;

(>) denotes multiple capitals or transition from one capital to another;

(?) denotes insufficient information to confirm capital or date of transition

political elites especially in the context of regnal change. But it also highlights the fact that the establishment of a new capital did not have a mechanical correlation with the monarch's ability to impose his/her authority or mobilize material resources. Both Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Balbān (r. 1266–87 CE) and 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī (r. 1296–1316 CE) were among the most powerful and authoritarian of the Delhi sultans; yet neither constructed "new" capitals for themselves, choosing instead to reside in Dihlī-yī kuhnaḥ, the old city. In the following two sections I study the history of Dihlī-yī kuhnaḥ and that of Kīlōkhīrī and Sīrī. I have tried to underline how the history of these capitals was shaped by the structure of political relationships and networks in which they were located. In the following two sections I elaborate how the capitals of the Delhi sultans were splendid signs of royal power, pomp and majesty, as well as vital arenas of conflict that could, in differing contexts, incarcerate or empower their resident monarchs. Even as they provide an insight into the construction of authority, the capitals of the sultans in Delhi also provide an unusual insight into the forces that challenged their power.

Dihlī-yī kuhnaḥ, Kīlōkhīrī and the dispensations of the sultans

It is sometimes forgotten that at the moment of sultan Iltutmish's accession in 1210 CE, the capital of the "Delhi" sultans was Lahore, not Delhi. Lahore was the old capital of the Ghaznavids and carried with it the prestige of past association with one of the most powerful empires of the eastern Iranian world. The old Rajput heritage of Delhi was hardly a marketable attribute by comparison.

Through the duration of his reign Iltutmish piloted the city towards a new Sultanate identity. By the time of his death in 1236 CE, he had constructed a formidable political enterprise through the deployment of a cadre of carefully trained and trusted military slaves (*bandagān*) and used them to cohere the distant provinces of north India around Delhi. He had also gained considerable stature as a pious Muslim sovereign who befriended the learned at a time when the Ching-īd invasions were destroying the cultural and religious centres of Islam. The Sultanate of Delhi and the world of Islam had altered during the duration of the monarch's rule and Minhāj-i Sirāj Juzjānī (d. c. 1270), the sultan's chronicler, tried to communicate its new character when he referred to the city as *Qubbat al-Islām*, or the sanctuary/axis of Islam.¹⁵ From one of the garrison camps of sultan Mu'izz al-Dīn Ghawrī, Iltutmish turned Dihlī-yī kuhnaḥ into a city without a rival in north India. In 1260 CE Jūzjānī was already referring to it as the "sacred" city, *ḥaṣṭat-i Dihlī*, an appellation that would be its *leitmotif* into the nineteenth century.

These accolades notwithstanding, Iltutmish's successor, sultan Rukn al-Dīn (r. 1236 CE), was quite emphatic about not wanting his father's political arrangements to continue into his reign.¹⁶ Rukn al-Dīn was an ambitious young sovereign and before his accession had served several years as a governor in his father's dispensation. His household included a large military retinue and secretarial help and these stayed with him when he became sultan. The introduction of new

personnel in the court meant challenging the entrenched might of his father's slave commanders who would resist any effort at marginalization. In short, if Rukn al-Dīn had to function with any degree of independence, the old dispensation of power had to give way to the new.

The future of Dihlī-yi kuhnah was deeply tied up with the conflicts among the city's political elite. In his effort to neutralize his father's commanders, the young monarch's response was to shift his capital out of Dihlī-yi kuhnah to Kīlōkhī, the first of several occasions when the sultan's court would leave the Old City. The new capital, Kīlōkhī, was located on a low hillock by the banks of the River Yamuna, a day's march to the north-east of the Old City. Sultan Rukn al-Dīn augmented his troops here and started a long-distance interference in the politics of the Old City: siblings were executed and attempts made to attract junior Shamsī commanders to join the Ruknī dispensation. The Shamsī *bandagān* responded quickly to the challenge: they seized and executed Rukn al-Dīn, placed his sister Raziyyah on the throne and consolidated their grip over Dihlī-yi kuhnah.

Although the crisis was over within the year, in placing a woman on the throne, the Shamsī slaves merely reinforced their rather conventional search for pliable puppet rulers within their master's household.¹⁷ Raziyyah was deposed when she displayed signs of rebelling against her protectors and was followed in quick succession by three more Shamsī descendants. These Shamsī princes made periodic but unsuccessful attempts to establish their independence but their slowly diminishing influence was effectively parodied by a court chronicler:

He [Nāsir al-Dīn, r. 1246–66 CE] sought the goodwill of the army chiefs and cordially wished each one of them well. He did not take any decision [rā'ī y'zādī] without their knowledge [bī-ilm-i īshān], or moved a foot without their orders [nah bī-hukm-i īshān dasī va pā'ī zādī]. He did not drink a drop of water, nor sleep a moment without their knowledge. . . .¹⁸

While Ilutmish's descendants were unsuccessful in gaining the political initiative over the Shamsī *bandagān* we should not miss the fact that they were also unable to shift the capital of the Sultanate out of Dihlī-yi kuhnah (see table above). It is also important to notice that these rulers did not stay in their ancestor's Shamsī capital out of choice; they were more appropriately incarcerated in the city by the Shamsī *bandagān*.

The reign of the Shamsī lineage came to an end with the accession of sultan Ghiyās al-Dīn Balban in 1266 CE whose rise to influence in the Delhi court had a much longer history. In the early years of his career he was a falconer in Sultan Ilutmish's retinue of military slaves and struggled with the political anonymity that came with the humble position.¹⁹ Balban's first significant political appointment occurred in 1244–5 CE when he was made court chamberlain (*amīl-hājib*). Although this was during the early years of the political conflict between the Shamsī *bandagān* (1242–54 CE), the instability helped rather than deterred Balban's rise to political stardom.²⁰ By 1249 CE he had consolidated his position in the court sufficiently to be appointed the deputy (*nā'ib*) of the state, a political

elevation that had social repercussions when his daughter was married to sultan Nāsir al-Dīn (r. 1246–66 CE).²¹ A brief hiatus in political exile in 1253 CE notwithstanding, Balban's stature in Dihlī-yi kuhnah was effectively unchallenged for 21 years (1244–53 and 1254–66 CE) before he became monarch. During this time he successfully raised a large military retinue that included Turkish slaves and humble *déracné* migrants, described derogatively by Jūzjānī, Baranī and Amir-i Khusrav (d. 725/1325) as homogenous ethnic groups—Afghans, Sistanis and Mongols.²²

The fourteenth century chronicler Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī mentioned how Balban's old compatriots feared visiting Delhi because they were convinced that their old mate was conspiring to have them all killed. Baranī's account was exaggerated: Balban's dispensation did include some of his old peers, but this was an exclusive group that included only those who had exchanged their original Shamsī affiliation for a new Ghiyāsī one. Or, looked at from a slightly different perspective, with the shift in the political affiliation of Dihlī-yi kuhnah's political elites, the old (Shamsī) city now housed the Ghiyāsī political dispensation. Through his long career in politics Balban had transformed Dihlī-yi kuhnah into a capital that reflected and constituted his authority.

Balban's successor, sultan Mu'izz al-Dīn Kayqubād (r. 1287–90 CE), however, chafed under his grandfather's legacy in ways that were very reminiscent of Rukn al-Dīn's experience with the Shamsī dispensation earlier in the century. But there were important differences between the two as well. Although Kayqubād was appointed to the throne by Ghiyāsī commanders he moved quickly to insulate himself from their influence. He shifted his capital to Kīlōkhī and supported his *protégé*, Niẓām al-Dīn, in a purge of the old Ghiyāsī commanders.

Mu'izz al-Dīn Kayqubād's choice of Kīlōkhī was also interesting—it had already been a Sultanate capital and had not atrophied in the 50 years since Rukn al-Dīn's reign. In the context of celebrations held in the royal court in Dihlī-yi kuhnah in 1258 CE, some years before Balban's accession, Jūzjānī described Kīlōkhī as the "New City" (*shahr-i naw*). In the preparations to receive Mongol ambassadors in the Old City, the New City had functioned as one of its outlying suburbs.²³ But the real transitions in Kīlōkhī only occurred in the 1280s, under sultan Kayqubād's patronage. At that time Baranī and Ḥamīd Qalandar (d. 641/1244) describe how Kīlōkhī came to possess the bazaars, the congregational mosque, the complex of neighbourhoods and leisure activities that historians today associate with an urban milieu. Over a half century later, in the middle of the fourteenth century CE, Baranī reminisced about his joyous youth spent in the New City.²⁴

Sultan Kayqubād's own fortune did not prosper in the same measure as his capital. In dealing with Niẓām al-Dīn and a succession of overbearing military commanders Kayqubād looked for subordinates outside the entrenched circle of Delhi's elites. He seized upon Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī, the military commander of the frontier districts of Sāmāna, a great candidate because together with his abilities as a general he was a virtual foreigner in Delhi. Although the Khalajīs had long served in Sultanate armies, their presence in the higher echelons of power was still a rarity; even as late as Balban's reign pointed allusions were made towards a Khalajī ambassador's rusticity by Delhi courtiers.²⁵ Even if raising a frontiersman to a

position of political eminence was a source of some consternation in politically conservative circles in Sultana politics, it was completely in line with the consistent patronage offered to social menials and *déraciné* marginals by Delhi sultans.³⁶ Sultan Kayqubād's effort at establishing his independence was challenged by members of the old Ghīyāṣī dispensation, led by the slave commanders Aytemür Kachchan and Surkha and they moved to replace the monarch with his infant nephew. This was an immediate threat to the balance of power in the court and it forced Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī into precipitous intervention to protect his interests.

Jalāl al-Dīn was actually well settled by this time to counter the Ghīyāṣī challenge. He had rallied his family members and other Khalajī groups around himself, gradually insinuating his family members and allies in Delhi politics until he had negated the denationalized condition that had originally made him an attractive subordinate to sultan Kayqubād. The frontiersman had struck roots in the capital quickly enough to challenge its power brokers. By the time the dust settled from the ensuing conflict, Kayqubād had been murdered; the infant prince, Kayūmār and his promoters, Aytemür Kachchan and Surkha, were also dead. The intra-dispensational conflict of 1290 CE left Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī as the new master of Kīlōkhī, but some members of Balban's family and retinue were still alive and present in Dihlī-yī kuhnah.³⁷

According to Baranī, because of the hostility of the city-residents (*shahrīyān*) to the new rulers, Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī felt it prudent to stay away from the Old City and reside instead at Kīlōkhī. Baranī's narrative explained that since the residents of the Dihlī-yī kuhnah included high officers of the deposed dynasty, they had reason to be unhappy about how kingship had passed from the lineage of the Turks to another (*az aṣl-i turkān dar aṣl-i dīgar*).³⁸ Baranī's reportage is particularly valuable for the way in which it inserts a spatial dimension to a conflict between rival dispensations. This conflict was between the "old" Balbanid coterie of commanders located in Dihlī-yī kuhnah and the "new" Khalajī dispensation of power based in the *shahr-i naw*: two cities in the riverine plain of Delhi hosting rival dispensations of power. Baranī explained that Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī visited Dihlī-yī kuhnah but did not feel welcome enough to situate his court and capital in that city.

We should, however, not misinterpret Baranī's narrative of these events as the mark of an exceptional moment in the history of the Sultana. In 1290 CE sultans of Turkish, slave descent were removed from the throne of Delhi but these changes did not alter the structure of Sultana governance or the contexts in which these monarchs shifted or stayed in their new and old capitals in the riverine plain of Delhi. In an effort to underline this point, the next section focuses on the turn of the thirteenth century CE and a renovated Dihlī-yī kuhnah and its relationship with the new Sultana capital of Sīrī.

Dihlī-yī kuhnah, Sīrī and the dispensations of the sultans

Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī's rule (1290–6 CE) was abruptly terminated when the monarch was assassinated by his nephew, 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī who became the next sultan of Delhi (r. 1296–1316 CE). At 'Alā' al-Dīn's accession Kīlōkhī was inhabited by

the sons, other relatives and followers of the late monarch. Although Dihlī-yī kuhnah was still ambivalent about Khalajī rule, it might have welcomed 'Alā' al-Dīn as the slayer of the disliked Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī. According to Baranī the new ruler lavished largesse on the residents of the city. On his arrival in the region of Delhi, 'Alā' al-Dīn defeated Jalāl al-Dīn's younger son, Qadr Khān and then made a ceremonious entry into Dihlī-yī kuhnah, finally terminating the relationship between the Delhi sultans and the New City.²⁹

During 'Alā' al-Dīn's reign it was the Old City that witnessed large-scale building activity, considerable renovation and repair, a huge increase in population and the construction of a new suburb, Sīrī. Baranī does mention that 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī altered the composition of his political dispensation three times during the course of his reign.³⁰ Correlating these transitions with the more general developments in 'Alā' al-Dīn's reign illuminates the significance of his development activity in and around Dihlī-yī kuhnah.

According to Baranī's narrative, the first phase of 'Alā' al-Dīn's reign, just after Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī's assassination, was clearly accommodative and inclusive, a period when the regicide was trying to win over supporters, including a large number of Jalālī servants. The effort made to recruit followers is also communitated by Baranī's description of the indiscriminate distribution of largesse by the monarch during his march and on his entry into Dihlī-yī kuhnah.³¹ And yet, the fissures created by the inter-dispensational conflict that had displaced the collateral lineage of Jalāl al-Dīn and brought 'Alā' al-Dīn to power were dramatically underlined when Dihlī-yī kuhnah was chosen as capital; just as sultan Jalāl al-Dīn lacked support in the Old City and made his capital in Kīlōkhī, 'Alā' al-Dīn could not countenance living in the New City and made his capital in Dihlī-yī kuhnah.

According to Baranī, this brief moment of accommodation (c. 1296–7 CE) was followed by a systematic purge of Jalālī commanders, a moment of exclusion which introduced the second phase in the construction of the 'Alā' dispensation.³² The military commanders who were particularly important during this period were family members like Ulugh Khān, old military elites like Nusrat Khān and administrators like Malik Hamīd al-Dīn. The sifting of subordinates that occurred during this phase altered the composition of the 'Alā' servants; it coincided with military campaigns into Gujarat and large-scale construction activity in the city that altered the face of Dihlī-yī kuhnah. This was the time when Delhi's first congregational mosque was expanded until it was double in size to the Shamsī mosque,³³ the fortifications of the city were repaired; the old "sultan's reservoir" (*ḥanṣ-i sulṭān*) was dredged, a new and larger one built (*ḥanṣ-i ḥāṣṣ*), new markets and price regulations were instituted and an army cantonment—Sīrī—constructed just outside the Old City.³⁴

By the time 'Alā' al-Dīn started appointing slaves and social menials to high positions in his dispensation, the monarch had also moved towards scripting his authorship over the face of the Old City.³⁵ As in the case of Balban a generation ago, this Delhi monarch did not change his capital; he purged old personnel and deployed new servants in a bid to establish his control over the Old City. Here he was far less successful than his esteemed predecessor. 'Alā' al-Dīn's rise to power

was far faster than Balban's and despite his energetic interventions he was unable to marginalize elite households in the Old City or silence opposition to his authoritarian rule. It is important to note that despite his investments in Dihlī-yī kuhnah, Baranī mentioned that 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī did not like living in the Old City. He was fed up with the resistance that he faced from its old households and chose to live outside the city in the vicinity of Sīrī which he eventually developed as a cantonment (*lashkargāh*) and alternate residence.³⁶ Sīrī was critical in preserving 'Alā' al-Dīn's authority: it allowed him the chance to escape from Dihlī-yī kuhnah; it became the cantonment where his huge standing army could be garrisoned to counter the threat of Mongol invasions; and it was the site from where the sultan could monitor politics in the Old City.

The historical antecedents of Sīrī, like Kīlōkhī, are not very clear. The first references in Sultanate literature to Sīrī appears in the context of sultan Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī's campaigns in 1290–1 CE, during the first year of his reign. Amīr-i Khusrāw mentions Sīrī as a site that existed between Dihlī-yī kuhnah and Kīlōkhī.³⁷ Apparently the Khalajī sultan used Sīrī as a mustering point, an encampment outside the Old City. 'Alā' al-Dīn used the site in a similar fashion: he camped there after assassinating Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī and provided this encampment with fortifications sometime during 1300 to 1303 CE in response to the invasions of the Mongol commanders Qutluğ Qoča and Taraghay.³⁸ Effectively, 'Alā' al-Dīn's court and political base oscillated between Dihlī-yī kuhnah and Sīrī. The latter was of great strategic importance to him and he spent a considerable amount of time there with his army. It may not have been his formal residence or "capital" but it was an important adjunct to Dihlī-yī kuhnah and significant to the construction of the monarch's authority.

Towards the end of his reign 'Alā' al-Dīn had become increasingly reliant upon his military slave Malik Kāfūr "Ḥazārīmārī" (killed 715/1316), the general who had led Khalajī expeditions into South India.³⁹ The 'Alā'ī slave exploited his position of trust with the sultan and consolidated his position in the court. When the sultan fell sick in 1316 CE Malik Kāfūr came into conflict with other important 'Alā'ī commanders, especially Alp Khān, and in the intra-dispensational conflict Khalajī princes like Khizr Khān and Shihāb al-Dīn 'Umar were "fronted" by rival camps.

Qutb al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh Khalajī (r. 1316–20 CE), a third candidate, triumphed in the succession conflict and the death of the major combatants in the year of intra-dispensational strife gave him the opportunity to consolidate his position. He proceeded to do so by deploying senior 'Alā'ī commanders as provincial governors and creating a cadre of loyal military slaves to dominate the Delhi region. Concurrently Mubārak Shāh Khalajī developed Sīrī as his capital and the home of his dispensation while quite deliberately diminishing the influence of Dihlī-yī kuhnah.⁴⁰

At this time the relationship between Sīrī and the Old City was somewhat similar to the one that had existed between Kīlōkhī and Dihlī-yī kuhnah, although Mubārak Shāh Khalajī's political independence and initiative far exceeded Kayqubād's.⁴¹ Mubārak Shāh seems to have expended considerable effort at giving Sīrī an urban character: like Kīlōkhī, it was fitted with a new congregational

mosque and its fortifications were refurbished. In keeping with the grandiloquent title of *Khalīfah* assumed by Mubārak Shāh, Sīrī was also ceremoniously referred to as the "residence of the caliph" (*dār al-khilāfah*), even though its more non-descript identity as "army camp" (*lashkargāh*) continued to linger.

Mubārak Shāh Khalajī was murdered in Sīrī in 1320 CE by his slave Khusrāw Khān Barwārī/Parwārī who had gained the sultan's intimacy and trust.⁴² In constructing his own dispensation of power Mubārak Shāh had allowed Khusrāw Khān to bring his kinsmen and other Barwārīds/Parwārīds to Delhi. Much like Kayqubād's recruitment of the *déracine* frontier commander Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī, Mubārak Shāh relied upon the denaturalized slave Khusrāw Khān to construct his authority. The efforts of both sultans were negated when their subordinates brought their associates to the capital and used their support to gain the throne.

Despite Baranī and Amīr-i Khusrāw's vitriolic attack on the apostate character of Khusrāw Khān, the newly enthroned slave actually won considerable support in Delhi.⁴³ It is important to keep in mind that Khusrāw Khān was not challenged by any member of the Khalajī dispensation in the Delhi region; it was Ghīyās al-Dīn Tughluq, the frontier commander of Dīpālpur who was apparently most aggrieved by events in Sīrī. Ghīyās al-Dīn's attempts to rally support from Khalajī commanders in Delhi were spurned and he led a motley crew of frontiersmen to Delhi. In the *Tughluqnāmah*, Amīr-i Khusrāw's eulogy to the future monarch, the author noted:

[Ghīyās al-Dīn's] troopers were mainly from the upper-lands [*iqīm-i bā'ā*; i.e. a euphemism for Khurasan and Transoxiana] and not Hindustanis or local chieftains. They included Ghuzz, Turks and Mongols from Rūm and Rūs and some Khurasani Persians [*āzīk*] of pure stock [*ṣāḥ asl*].⁴⁴

To this motley crowd, Abū 'l-Malik 'Iṣāmī (d. 761/1360) added the Khokars, a body of frontier pastoralists, forever in conflict with Sultanate armies and at least one Afghan commander.⁴⁵

Ghīyās al-Dīn Tughluq (r. 1320–4 CE) won the battle for Delhi and, like Jalāl al-Dīn and 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī, commenced his rule on an accommodative note, reinstalling a large number of the old Khalajī commanders to office. He kept his capital at Sīrī because he wanted to emphasize continuity with the Khalajī regime and gain support from a political elite who greeted the new frontiersman-turned-sultan with some ambivalence. While accommodating a large element of the old Khalajī elite, Ghīyās al-Dīn's political dispensation included members of his frontier entourage. Baranī commented:

The maliks, emirs and other officers of his predecessors, he confirmed in their possessions and appointments. When he attained the throne, his nobleness and generosity of character made him distinguish and reward all those he had known and been connected with, and all those who in former days had shown him kindness or rendered him a service. No act of kindness was passed over⁴⁶

For a frontier commander new to Delhi politics, Ghiyās al-Dīn Tughluq moved with remarkable assurance in his early search for political stability. Quite significantly this phase of his reign coincided with the duration of his residence at Sirī. By 1323 CE construction in his new capital of Tughluqābād had progressed sufficiently for Ghiyās al-Dīn to shift his court there. Apparently, the great 'Alā'ī commanders were aware of the changes that were occurring in the power equations in his realm. While campaigning in South India they were ready to believe a rumour that the sultan had ordered their execution. They rebelled, were captured and executed.⁴⁷ The episode is significant for a variety of related factors: that the nature of developments in Ghiyās al-Dīn's reign could warn 'Alā'ī commanders and sway them into rebellion; that their execution marked the final dissolution of the old Khalajī dispensation; and finally that the news of the suppression of the Khalajī revolt was sent to Ghiyās al-Dīn's new court at Tughluqābād. By 1323 CE the new dispensation of power in Delhi had a residence all to its own.

Like Dihlī-yi kuhnah and Kīlōkhī, Sirī would never again be used as a capital by a Delhi monarch. The following sultans of the Tughluq dynasty started another round of construction activity in the riverine plain: Tughluqābād was followed by 'Ādīlābād and Jahānpārān when Muḥammad Tughluq became monarch (r. 1324–51 CE) and Firūz Shāh Tughluq (r. 1351–88 CE) constructed the new capital of Firūzābād, all in the fourteenth century CE.

When medieval chroniclers narrated the coming and going of Delhi sultans with such rapidity they found in it lessons about fate and destiny, the transitory nature of material success and a reminder of God's sovereignty in the affairs of mortals. 'Iṣāmī constructed his whole versified epic on the Delhi sultans, *Futūḥ al-salāṭīn*, as a reminder of God's sovereign will embodied in Qur'ān 3:26: 'O Allāh! Possessor of the kingdom, You give the kingdom to whom You will, and You take the kingdom from whom You will . . .'. The theme had wide currency and it infiltrated an anecdote reported by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 779/1377), the Moroccan traveller to the court of Muḥammad Shāh Tughluq, explaining the construction of the capital of Tughluqābād. The story concerned a conversation between sultan Muḥārak Shāh Khalajī and his military commander Ghiyās al-Dīn Tughluq which occurred during a hunting expedition near the Aravalli hills at the south-eastern edge of the Delhi plain. The sultan's servant, Ghiyās al-Dīn Tughluq, initiated the conversation by remarking on the excellent qualities of the escaped land where they had stopped to rest. He suggested that it was an appropriate site for Muḥārak Shāh Khalajī to construct his capital. With a touch of prescience, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's story had Muḥārak Shāh Khalajī reply: 'When you are sultan, build it!' Ibn Baṭṭūṭa concluded the anecdote thus: 'It came to pass by the decree of God that [Ghiyās al-Dīn] became sultan, so he built [his capital there] . . . and called it by his name.'⁴⁸ Just as destiny had decreed that Ghiyās al-Dīn Tughluq would be sultan, so too had God identified Tughluqābād as a site for a Sultanate capital.

The insertion of divine agency took the historical element out of the prosaic temporal world of mortals and added to the prestige of a monarch and, indeed, his capital. This was necessary, of course, because as we have noticed, the frequent transitions in kingship and capitals through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries

made it really difficult for literateurs to graft any semblance of royalty on the careers of their protagonists. Only a particularly gifted *littérateur*—someone like Amīr-i Khusrāw—could prosper as a eulogist in this world over the long duration. Since the construction of power, kingship and capitals was not associated with birthright they had to be assembled afresh in each generation. A monarch that failed to recruit his (and as it happened in one case, her) retinue ran the certainty of losing political independence, a fate that often left them incarcerated within the boundaries of their predecessor's capital.

Implicit in the study of the constant shifting of capitals in the Delhi plain is the recognition that the seizure of political power by parvenu military commanders of various social and cultural backgrounds also periodically reconstituted Sultanate society at the highest levels. Even as historians underline the great political flux and discontinuities of the Sultanate period, they do not research the social and cultural consequences that this constant shuffling created in making and reproducing Muslim society through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The next section studies this subject from the perspective of political traditions and customs brought to Delhi by new ruling groups and the response of the Persian literateurs to the political cultures of their masters.

Persianate literati, parvenu lords and courtly culture

Through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE the population of Dihlī-yi kuhnah increased substantially. Sometime around 1287 CE and the end of Balban's reign, the young Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' (d. 725/1325) arrived in the Old City. He did not yet possess the stature of a great teacher and mystic, in the late 1280s Nizām al-Dīn was only an impoverished student, reliant upon his friends for a room in Dihlī-yi kuhnah where he stayed briefly. The Old City had expanded over the last century until a visitor to the city, someone like Nizām al-Dīn, found it crowded, dirty environs distasteful. Nizām al-Dīn spent much of his waking hours outside the city in the environs of the nearby reservoir, the *hawā-i rāmī*, before leaving the precincts altogether and setting up his hospice some distance away, near Kīlōkhī, in the relatively remote area of Ghiyāspūr.⁴⁹ This discomfort with the Old City had a lot to do with Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā's ideological ambivalence towards material life and comfort, elements that were quite unambiguously associated with the court of the Delhi sultans.

As we have already noticed the imprint of Delhi's rulers was strongly felt on the city and there was unanimity in thirteenth and fourteenth century sources that Delhi's prosperity was a consequence of the incumbent ruler's patronage. But this might have only been a half-truth. Whereas the munificence of the Delhi sultan and his/her courtiers "pulled" people to the capital, Mongol depredations in eastern Iran, Transoxiana, Afghanistan and in the Punjab and Sind provinces "pushed" a large number of *émigrés* to Delhi as well. Its impact was most evident in the sheer diversity of the migrants who reached Delhi. Beyond the large numbers it is the change in the social profile of migrants through the thirteenth century CE that is most interesting. In the 1220s and 1230s, as the centres of

Muslim urban civilization in Kh̄arazm, Transoxiana, Khurasan, Sistan and Afghanistan suffered devastation, a large number of *littérateurs*, secretaries, landed elites and aristocrats sought sanctuary in Delhi. Their numbers gradually tapered off in the 1240s and 1250s and Baranī who speaks of the social profile of the *émigré* nobles present in Ilutmish's court with the greatest degree of respect displays no such sentiment for immigrants intruding into Delhi politics from the second half of the thirteenth century.⁴⁷ At that time different types of frontier elements—Mongol groups and their auxiliaries—migrated to the Sultanate in search of patronage and fortune. For a Persian scholar such as Z̄iyā al-Dīn Baranī, a fourth generation descendant of a family of secretaries whose ancestors had served the Sultanate regimes in high administrative positions, these Mongol migrants were regarded as *naḥ-musalman*, new Muslims of indiscriminate social origins. But it was not just the Mongols who were derided by the Persephone literati. Baranī and other Sultanate chroniclers also looked askance more generally at people of pastoral backgrounds, trading professions, local converts and manumitted slaves who aspired to high positions in Sultanate administration and manumitted slaves who were described as “base born” (*bad aslī va na-kas*); people who were “base and impure” (*na-jinsan va khadiṣan*); or those who belonged to the class of the “lowest and basest of the low and base-born” (*siflah i arin va rizālah i arin-i siflah gān va rizālah gān*).⁴⁸ According to the Persian authors, Sultanate rulers would do well to respect birth and cultural accomplishments when they chose their servants and administrators.

The context in which the Persian *littérateurs* tendered their advice should not be forgotten. Quite contrary to the aristocratic normative systems recommended in the Persian courtly literatures the sultans of Delhi and the commanders they empowered came from nondescript social backgrounds. Even if the slave lineages of Ilutmish and Balban had acculturated to the Persianate, urbane traditions of Delhi through the thirteenth century CE, this was not the case with recent migrants from the frontier like the Khalajīs or the Tughluqs. Both Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī and Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Tughluq lacked a base in Delhi and were strongly opposed by the capital's political elite. These were the courtiers towards whom the Persian literati directed their advice on governance and the need to patronize aristocrats and not the riff-raff, marginal social groups that constituted their political dispensations.

The Persian literati had to show remarkable discretion in their discussion of these themes; they could hardly draw attention to the indifferent social backgrounds of their political masters especially when like the Qarā'ūna Tughluqs or the Khalajīs, at one time allies of the Qarlūqs, they had shared ethnic or a past service association with the Mongols, inveterate foes of Isīam and the Sultanate.⁴⁹ There was a great deal of dissimulation and a considerable amount of reification in the narratives of the Persian *littérateurs* as they tried to comprehend and communicate the unfamiliar, frontier-pastoral cultural traditions of their masters in a familiar lexicon of Perso-Islamic traditions of governance. To elaborate the complicated terrain that this process of translation can cover I have studied two examples, one each from the Khalajī and Tughluq regimes.

The first example concerns traditions of succession followed by members of the Khalajī dynasty during the short 30-year duration of their rule (1290–1320 CE). At the outset, these traditions were evident at the time of Jalāl al-Dīn's murder in 667/1296. At his death the Delhi sultan had two sons: the older one, Arkatī Khān, who had the monarch's trust, was given considerable authority over armies, territories and in the punishment of rebels.⁵⁰ Jalāl al-Dīn's younger son, Qadr Khān, was too young to have received any prior political appointment. At Jalāl al-Dīn Khalajī's murder Baranī expected that the competent Arkatī Khān would succeed his father and could not restrain his surprise when the Queen mother, Malikah-yi Jahān placed the younger sibling on the throne.⁵¹

Baranī's inability to comprehend these developments is apparent from his clichéd, gendered remarks about Malikah-yi Jahān. She was somewhat of a shrew, Baranī informs us, a stubborn, willful person who had dominated her husband while he was alive.⁵² The impetuous act of placing the young Qadr Khān on the throne and assuming the regency herself was in keeping with her naïve, foolish character. She did not consult anyone and as her experiment led the dynasty into disaster, Baranī had Malikah-yi Jahān confess the folly of her actions. According to Baranī the queen admitted: ‘I am a woman and women are deficient in judgement [*naqāṣat-i ‘aql*].’⁵³ Tenuous as the gendered explanations provided by the author may be, they are rendered even more fragile at Baranī's recounting of the older son's reactions at the loss of the throne. The energetic, valiant Arkatī Khān who had once had the Sufi saint Sīdī Muwāllih crushed by an elephant, accepted his exclusion from the throne as a fair accomplishment. Instead of disputing the succession, he retreated to his appanage in Multān. There he remained despite Baranī's account that the queen apologized repeatedly for her actions and entreated the older son to return to Delhi to oppose the rebel ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khalajī.⁵⁴

The Khalajīs ruled for three generations and every succession during their rule of 30 years was disputed. Obviously the assumption of high office was never resolved to the satisfaction of rival claimants. Important to keep in mind is the fact that these claimants were *always* members of the ruling family and in attempting to curtail intra-lineage conflict, the fourth dynast, Mubārak Shāh Khalajī (716–20/1316–20), incarcerated many of his siblings, eventually blinding and executing them.⁵⁵ In this milieu, Malikah-yi Jahān's placing of young Qadr Khān on the throne—Baranī's horror notwithstanding—was one accession that remained unchallenged. The older brother seemed to accept—for the moment anyway—the right of his younger sibling to the throne.

This was in contrast to ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khalajī's own experience. After seizing the throne he was generous to many of his relatives and gave them high positions, but as we have already seen, through the duration of his reign he progressively segregated authority in his own person. Sometime around 700/1301 an attempt was made on ‘Alā’ al-Dīn's life. The perpetrator was Ikī Khān, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khalajī's youngest brother's son.⁵⁶ Baranī attributed base ambition as the motive for Ikī Khān's animosity but it should not escape our scrutiny that in seizing power, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khalajī had reversed the order of succession that had prevailed a generation earlier. If Malikah-yi Jahān had appointed the youngest son to the throne excluding

the older sibling; Alā' al-Dīn was the oldest sibling and his right to the throne was challenged by the disaffected descendants of his youngest brother.

Baranī's reportage makes it extremely difficult to comprehend the working of Khalajī customs of inheritance. Certainly one of their traditions seemed to privilege the rights of the youngest son. It is hard to say whether these constituted traditions of ultimogeniture somewhat like the rights of the "hearth-prince" (*öcëgin*) recognized by some Turkish tribes and the Chingisid family.⁶⁰ Tantalizing as the evidence might be, in its scantiness it remains hardly compelling. More germane for our present discussion, however, is the need to notice Baranī's complete inability to fathom the customary practices of the regnant sultans of Delhi. While his diatribe against Malikah-yi Jahān reveals the author's own rather conventionally gendered location, it also underlines the Persian *littérateur's* inability to comprehend the cultural world of his protagonists, recent *émigrés* to the Sultanate and now its rulers. Even as they became governors of the Persianate world of the Sultanate and masters of Delhi, the "Sanctuary of Islam", they continued to practice succession rituals whose customary provenance was quite incomprehensible to their court chroniclers.

Equally distant to the cultural traditions of Delhi were the Tughluqs, whose dynastic founder, Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn, was hailed as the 'Saviour of Islam' even though his retinue consisted of Khokhars, 'Ghuzz, Turks and Mongols from Rūm and Rūs'.⁶¹ All of whom had challenged the authority of the Sultanate in the past. No Persian chronicler ever made anything of the disjunction between the past careers and present fortunes of the members of the early Tughluq political dispensation. And yet the travelogue of Ibn Baṭṭiṭa suggests that the Tughluqs placed considerable premium on their notables acculturating rapidly to "Muslim ways". He noted that in Muḥammad Tughluq's reign:

all [courtiers] were required to show a knowledge of the obligations of ablution, prayers and the binding articles of Islam. They used to be questioned on these matters; if anyone failed to give correct answers he was punished and they made a practice of studying them with one another in the audience hall and the bazaars and setting them down in writing.⁶²

This was an unusual requirement to demand of practicing Muslims unless, of course, their ritual praxis was regarded as somewhat deficient.

While Persian chronicles gloss over some uncomfortable details about their lords and masters, the amateur ethnography of Ibn Baṭṭiṭa carries interesting details about Tughluq court rituals and ceremonial. He provided the following description of Muḥammad Tughluq's royal procession on festivals:

On the morning of the feast all the elephants are adorned with silk, gold and precious stones. There are sixteen of these elephants which no one rides, but they are reserved to be ridden by the sultan himself, and over them are carried sixteen parasols of silk embroidered with jewels, each one with a shaft of pure gold. . . . The sultan himself rides on one of these elephants and in front of him

there is carried aloft the *ghāshiyah*, that is his saddle-cover, which is adorned with the most precious jewels. In front of him walk his slaves and his Mamluks.⁶³

Ibn Baṭṭiṭa added further details regarding the ritual at the time of the sultan's entry into the capital:

On some of the [sixteen] elephants there were mounted small military catapults and when the sultan came near the city, parcels of gold and silver coins mixed together were thrown from these machines. The men on foot in front of the sultan and the other persons present scrambled for the money, and they kept on scattering it until the procession reached the palace. . . .⁶⁴

While *ghāshiyah* has an Arabic etymology, meaning to cover or veil,⁶⁵ the origin of the ceremony lies in the accession and ceremonial rituals of the early Turks where the "Lord of the Horse" would be identified with the newly enthroned leader and the procession would celebrate the conquest of the four quarters by the Universal Emperor.⁶⁶ The tradition was followed in some of the major steppe-descended polities in the central Islamic lands: by the Saljuqs, the Zangids and the Bahārī Mamluks of Egypt (with a military elite of Qipchaq origin).⁶⁷ At least in Syria and Egypt it was accepted as a ritual associated with royalty and performed by the Kurdish Ayyubids, who learnt of it from their Turkish patrons the Zangids. With the Ayyubids it was integrated as a part of their accession ceremony together with the ritual pledge of allegiance, *bay'ah*, and the investiture from the caliph.⁶⁸

Detailed descriptions of the *ghāshiyah* ritual exist from the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt where Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn Taghribirdī (d. 874/1470) clarified that it was a part of the accession ceremonies of the monarch and repeated on major festivals. Its performance in Egypt mirrors Ibn Baṭṭiṭa's description of the ceremony from Muḥammad Tughluq's court and Ahmad al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418) provided the following description:

[The *ghāshiyah*] is a saddle cover of leather, decorated with gold so that the observer would take it to be made entirely of gold. It is borne before him [i.e. the Mamluk sultan] when riding in state processions for parades, festivals, etc. The *rikābdārīyah* [grooms, i.e. *ghulāms*] carry it, the one who holds it up in his hands turning it right and left. It is one of the particular insignia of this kingdom.⁶⁹

An important common feature between the Mamluk state in Egypt and the Delhi Sultanate was their common reliance upon Turko-Mongol personnel from the trans-Caucasian steppes, the Dāshī-i Qipchaq. The Sultanate's link with the Eurasian steppe already present in Ilkhanid's reign continued into the reign of Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Tughluq who was of Negüderid background, and had a retinue of 'Turks and Mongols from Rūm and Rūs'.⁷⁰

Just as Baranī had noticed the curious succession traditions of the Khalajīs but unable to understand them had reported it in the gendered terms familiar to his

world, he certainly witnessed Tughluq procession rituals but filtered out those elements that made them unfamiliar to his experience. Curiously enough Baranī's description of Alā' al-Dīn's triumphant march to Delhi after Jalāl al-Dīn's murder (695/1296) does possess some of the elements present in Batūṭa's description, although completely different motives for the discharge of gold coins (*panj' man akhtar*, lit.: five mans of gold stars) among the crowds observing the sultan's march are ascribed by the author.⁷¹ Equally selective was Yāhyā ibn Ahmad Sirhindī's early fifteenth century account of Muhammad Tughluq's celebratory procession after his accession. The narrative is close enough to Ibn Batūṭa's description of the *ghāshiyah* ritual for us to follow its main features but the elisions are important as well. Sirhindī noted that:

the lanes were decorated with coloured and embroidered cloth. From the time that the sultan set his foot in the city till he entered the imperial palace, gold and silver coins were rained from the back of the elephants among the populace, and gold was scattered in every street, lane, and house.⁷²

In Baranī and Sirhindī's accounts the sultan's triumphal processions receive due recognition but there is no reference to the *ghāshiyah*. Was the omission deliberate or was it an aspect of Turko-Mongol practice quite unfamiliar to Persian searates? Were they, in other words, just inadequate historians reifying the practice of their subjects either through ignorance or because of their own class and cultural prejudices?

Baranī was a contemporary of Ibn Batūṭa and both authors were in Delhi during Muḥammad Tughluq's reign. If the Moroccan visitor could notice and learn about the *ghāshiyah* during his visit, so, theoretically speaking, could Baranī. In Baranī's narrative Ghiyās al-Dīn was a "Saviour of Islam", a morally righteous Muslim, renowned for his combat with the infidel Mongols and against the heathen menace that was suddenly threatening Delhi. The challenge to Islam appeared when the usurper Khusrāw Khān Barwārī/Parwārī, a recent convert slave, killed his master and his heirs, despoiled his master's harem and apostatized. Just as Ghiyās al-Dīn Tughluq had saved the Sultanate from the Mongols, this conflict with Khusrāw Khān Barwārī/Parwārī was over the future well-being of the Muslim community. By incorporating details about the Turko-Mongol antecedents of Ghiyās al-Dīn and the composition of his retinue, or noting the practice of (un-Islamic) steppe rituals by the frontier commander, Baranī would have complicated the simple binaries around which he had framed the qualities of his protagonist—the Muslim hero versus the non-Muslim—and his narration of the triumph of rectitude over evil. The author preferred not to tread these waters. Once the social and cultural backgrounds of Ghiyās al-Dīn Tughluq and his frontier retinue were erased what was left was a relatively monochromatic picture of a Muslim Delhi Sultanate valiantly battling a sea of infidels, holding aloft the banner of Islam even as the Mongol deluge swept away the civilization of the *dār al-islām* elsewhere. In this narration the complex connections of the Tughluqs with regions and cultures outside the subcontinent were completely erased.

Conclusion: Writing a history of Sultanate courtly traditions

In conventional historiography the Delhi Sultanate is characterized as a Muslim state that had by the fourteenth century seized control over much of the material resources of north India and was expanding aggressively into the Deccan. In this historiography, the Sultanate was established with its Islamic and Persianate credentials intact, receiving its high traditions from its Ghaznavid, Saljuq and Kh'arazmī neighbours. This was a state that was Mughal-like in its imperial vision even if it remained deficient in comparison to its successor in the administrative execution of its lofty vision. Within the limits of this historiography, the constant shifting of capitals by the Delhi sultans was believed to have served the grandiose, authoritative purpose of validating the rule of powerful monarchs even if they were also wasteful, indulgent displays of their wealth and power. In this instance, modern bourgeois, even socialist preferences coalesced with medieval Islamic ones in an ambivalent response to absolutist rule.

In contrast to those who would read the Sultanate as a period of absolutist rule, my paper suggests that an abiding characteristic of the Delhi Sultanate in the long duration was the extreme fragility of its political associations. Although this political instability allowed for the concentration of extreme authority and material resources in the hands of a monarch, it made its reproduction in succeeding generations extremely difficult. Since structures of political association resided on paternalistic, inter-personal ties they required renewed mobilization under each ruler through a fresh dispensation of favours. One material manifestation of this political process was the construction of capitals to house new political dispensations.

Studying the construction and representation of Sultanate authority in Delhi also underlines the great diffusion of authority among a variety of political agents in the realm. Sultans were frequently *forced* to move from Dihlī-yi kuhnah because its entrenched elite were altogether too hostile to new incumbents. Inter and intra-dispensational conflicts were common during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE but what is perhaps unique to the Delhi Sultanate is the spatial dimension this conflict could take. If the construction or resettlement of a capital marked a monarch's bid to establish his or her own autonomous political sphere, not all monarchs were able to achieve this end.

The political arena of the Delhi Sultanate expanded dramatically through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries with a large number of new players surfacing with each generation. This was not just an increase in numbers but also in social and ethnic complexity. Afghans appeared on the political terrain in the 1260s CE and were described with some awe by a Persian chronicler thus:

Their heads are like big sacks of straw, their beards like the combs of the weaver, long-legged as the stork but more ferocious than the eagle, their heads lowered like that of the owl of the wilderness.⁷³

By the 1280s when Turko-Mongol contingents started joining Sultanate forces Baranī derided them as *naw-musalman*. Amīr-i Khusrāw communicated his

sentiments about these people when he described his Qarā'ūna captor as follows: 'He sat on his horse like a leopard on a hill. His open mouth smelt like an arm-pit, whiskers fell from his chin like pubic hair.'¹² Notably Amīr-i Khusrav penned these sentiments in 1285 CE and 35 years later he was eulogizing Ghiyās al-Dīn Tughluq as the "Rescuer of Islam" in his *Tughluqnāmah*, blithely ignoring the fact that his patron was also a Qarā'ūna Turk who had only lately been a nomad. Ghiyās al-Dīn's ethnicity and social background made it difficult—but not impossible—for him to break into the circles of power in Delhi. Once he had crossed the Rubicon and seized the throne his identity and past were recrafted in terms that the Persian literati felt was commensurate with the status of a great monarch of Islam. Other than frontier commanders, Persian chronicles also grafted enviable genealogies for rulers of slave descent like Ilutmish and Balban. But there was also the notable exception of Sultan Khusrav Khān Baravār/Parvār, a favourite slave of Mubārak Shāh Khalajī, raised to high political service who went on to usurp the throne in 1320 CE. Khusrav Khān alone had the dubious distinction among slave-rulers of having court chronicles focus on his natal origins, receiving harsh criticism for possessing the temerity to become monarch and ultimately charged with apostasy,¹³ foregoing thereby all rights to be the leader and protector of the Muslim community. The bias of the Persian literati against Khusrav Khān is particularly exceptional given the support he apparently received from the elite circles in Delhi—including the Sufi Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā'. It is possible that Khusrav Khān's subcontinental origins were remembered *once* the tide had turned against him; Amīr-i Khusrav might well have eulogized him had he continued as sultan. Certainly the selective display of amnesia shown by the Persian literati is telling. A Qarā'ūna ex-nomad made for an acceptable monarch in the opinion of these *littérateurs* but not a slave from the subcontinent—what other uncomfortable elisions and glosses do these Persian narratives carry and what facets of social life did they choose to elide?

The point is of some relevance in the context of court ritual. As with Sultante regimes elsewhere in the Islamic world, Persian chroniclers suggested that the Delhi sultans also broadcast their authority in fairly traditional ways: they had their name read in the Friday sermon (*khutbah*), they issued coins with their titles on the sigilla, their authority was ceremoniously recognized by elites (*bay'at*), they sought caliphal recognition to rule and they followed the grand courtly rituals of Iran requiring petitioners to prostrate (*sijdah*) and kiss the ground or the hem of the royal cloak (*pā'ī būst/qadam būst*). But these were by no means the only rituals of authority performed by the Delhi sultans. There were traditions of succession and rituals of pomp and pageantry performed by the Khalajī and Tughluq sultans that were not a part of the Perso-Islamic milieu of the Persian literati. These were a part of the customary traditions followed by the frontier elements that withstood acculturation and became a part of the culture of the Delhi court. The Persian literati grappled to comprehend these and almost always filtered them through cultural lenses that refracted their contents into familiar contours. The records of the Persian literati were thereby extremely successful in transcribing the world of the Delhi sultans in relatively seamless and homogenous terms. This

world did have its aberrations when *raw-musalman*s were patronized or the apostate Khusrav Khān became sultan. But these were exceptional moments where normalcy and order was restored in Persian narratives through heroic characters such as Ghiyās al-Dīn Tughluq.

The impression of a monolithic, stable Muslim society and state carried in the thirteenth and fourteenth century Persian records should hardly surprise us. We should not expect Persian *littérateurs* located on Islam's eastern frontier, facing Mongol invasions, to acknowledge the humble social origins of their rulers and their practice of unfamiliar non-*shar'ī* political traditions and rituals. And yet, it was these turbulent historical processes that shaped the complex character of the Muslim community under the Delhi Sultanate, created the conditions for the frequent coming and going of sultans and their many capitals and marked a centre of the world, an axis that gained credibility as *hazrat-i Dihli*.

Notes

- 1 See Ibn Khaldūn (1974), 263–73, 279–95.
- 2 See Baranī (1972). This was not the only didactic text written by Zīyā' al-Dīn Baranī. His *Tarīkh-i Firuz shāhī* (see *idem* (1860–2)), is critical to an appreciation of the author's opinions on ideal governance. The intertextuality between the two works has been usefully detailed by Hardy (1957), 315–21; *idem* (1966), 20–39.
- 3 See Baranī (1860–2), 179f.
- 4 See *idem* (1972), 217–31.
- 5 See *ibid.*, 140f.
- 6 See *ibid.*, 184–7, 193–216.
- 7 A good example of colonial historiography in this genre would be Cunningham (1871), 1:132–84.
- 8 For the most lucid and forceful exposition of this argument, see Habib (1978), 287–303.
- 9 See Ali (1986), 34–44.
- 10 For the clearest theorisation of this argument see Wink (1997–2004).
- 11 See in particular Cohen (1989), 513–19. According to Goswamy (1986), 137f, Delhi was the centre of Jain manuscript production in the thirteenth century. Although the longer history of this tradition has only started to be researched (see Cohen (1989)), it is certain that Jain manuscript production did not start *de novo* in the thirteenth century; Delhi certainly possessed a sizeable Jain population and their patronage of cultural and religious artefacts is visible in the spolia of Jain temples in Delhi's twelfth century CE congregational mosque.
- 12 An extremely valuable discussion on the *dihlīvalī* and the presence of a min in Delhi can be found in Deyell (1990), 144–83.
- 13 Baranī (1860–2) is particularly problematic in this context. Note, for example, his narrative on Kīlōkhīr during Kīyqubad's reign (157–65) where the author uses "Dihlī" and "Kīlōkhīr" quite randomly. See also the useful discussion in Jackson (1986). Since the various Sultante settlements in Delhi ranged a great deal in size and complexity, describing them as undifferentiated cities can be somewhat confusing. At the time of their inception, many scarcely deserved the epithet of "city" and others declined from flourishing urban centres to mere military camps. Although a study of the processes of urbanization is not the subject of my inquiry, I have tried to remain sensitive to these differences while remaining attentive to size, scale and changes in the histories of Sultante capitals.

- 14 See Yazdī (1888), II:125, cited in Alī (1986), 35. "Dihlī-yī kulnār" is to be preferred over "Qil'ah-yī Rāi Pithorā" a name coined for the first city by Abū 'l-Fazl 'Alāmī (assassinated 1011/1602). In the *ʿĀm-i akbarī*, Abū 'l-Fazl provided a brief history of Delhi's ruling families and in that context identified the Old Fort as the "Fort of Rāy Pithvirāj" Abū 'l-Fazl's account was incorrect in that Pithvirāj Chauhān (d. 1192 CE) resided in Ajmer, never in Delhi, which was under the control of his governor, Govind Rāi. Lately, ultra-nationalist Hindutva historiography has appropriated Pithvirāj as a significant "national" martyr who died defending India from foreign Muslim incursions. In this malicious reinterpretation of history, where Hindus and Muslims are in perpetual combat, it helps for Delhi, the capital of the modern national state, to also appear as Pithvirāj's capital. On some of these historiographical issues see Kumar (2010 forthcoming).
- 15 See Juzjānī (1963-4), I:441. For a discussion of these historical processes see Kumar (2001), 140-82.
- 16 For an account of Rukn al-Dīn's reign see Juzjānī (1863-4), I:455-7; 'Iṣāmī (1938), 130.
- 17 For a detailed analysis of his reign see Kumar (2007), 181-5, 256-9.
- 18 Space prohibits a fuller discussion of the subject which I am developing separately in an article preliminarily titled 'The Woman and the *hisāb* of Men: Sulṭānāh Razīyah and Early Sulṭanate Society'. See also Jackson (1998), 81-97.
- 19 'Iṣāmī (1938), 146.
- 20 On Ilutmish's death, Balban, together with his other junior cohorts, fled from Dihlī-yī kulnār in search of better opportunities; see Juzjānī (1963-4), II:48, 51.
- 21 For further details on the nature of this intra-dispensational conflict (1242-55), see Kumar (2007), 266-72, for Balban's early political career see *ibid.*, 254, 263, 269-85.
- 22 See Juzjānī (1963-4), I:483, II:59f.
- 23 See Juzjānī (1963-4), II:83. In 1287, when Sulṭān Kayqubād also established his capital at Kīlōkhīr, Baranī used identical terms—*shahr-i naw*—to describe the young monarch's capital; see Baranī (1860-2), 175f, 180f. Curiously enough, Juzjānī did not use this appellation for Rukn al-Dīn's capital in 1236. This may not be terribly significant: in all likelihood *shahr-i naw* was coined in Rukn al-Dīn's reign as a name for his capital and gained currency to differentiate it from the Old City. The persistence of the name, however, does suggest continued habitation in the area contradicting Nizām al-Dīn's more polemical remarks about the desolate nature of the region when he first established his hospice in the neighbourhood; see Sijzī (1990), 243.
- 24 See Baranī (1860-2), 130f, 164-6, for the congregational mosque in Kīlōkhīr see Qalandar (1959), 125, 283.
- 25 For Juzjānī's supercilious comments regarding Balban's emissary, Jamāl al-Dīn 'Alī Khalajī, see Juzjānī (1863-4), II:86-8.
- 26 For a full development of this trend see Kumar (2006), 83-114.
- 27 Although many followed Malik Chhajū (Balban's nephew) to Kara (see Baranī (1860-2), 181f, 184) when he was appointed governor of the region, there were still significant numbers around in Delhi to support Sīdī Muwālīh's bid to the throne in circa 1292 CE (see *ibid.*, 181, 208-12).
- 28 See *ibid.*, 176.
- 29 See *ibid.*, 246f.
- 30 See *ibid.*, 249-51, 336f.
- 31 See *ibid.*, 243-5, 247.
- 32 See *ibid.*, 249-51.
- 33 For a development of this idea in the context of 'Alā' al-Dīn's renovations and construction in Dihlī-yī Kulnār's congregational mosque see Kumar (2000), 37-65.
- 34 On 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī and Sīrī, see also Jackson (1986).
- 35 Baranī described this as his final, most authoritarian and misguided phase. See Baranī (1860-2), 337. The chronicler provided no dates for the beginning of this phase and distinguished it as a unique moment between the changes that occurred in the offices of the *dharm-i risālat*, *vizārat* and *irshād*. These secretarial posts remained with the "people of the pen", but among individuals who Baranī did not respect. The deployment of slaves and social menials on the other hand was pursued by 'Alā' al-Dīn throughout his reign. Note, for example, Baranī's description of the role of slaves in protecting 'Alā' al-Dīn during the attack of Ikht Khān at Tilpat, ca 1301 CE (see *ibid.*, 273). According to Baranī's periodisation, this event occurred during the second phase of the sultan's rule.
- 36 See *ibid.*, 283.
- 37 See Amīr-i Khusrāw (1954), 23, 25, 36.
- 38 See Baranī (1860-2), 246, 302.
- 39 For a useful account of Malik Kāfūr and the South Indian expeditions see Jackson (1999), 175f, 201-4, 206-9, 213f.
- 40 For Mubārak Shāh Khalajī and Sīrī see Amīr-i Khusrāw (1950), 76-80; Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1958-71), III:619; Sijzī (1990), 311.
- 41 His capacity for independent political initiative was perhaps best displayed when he launched military expeditions into South India. See Amīr-i Khusrāw (1950), 62-73, 195-202.
- 42 See Baranī (1860-2), 402-9.
- 43 See *ibid.*, 409-23; Amīr-i Khusrāw (1933), 55-70 for details on military commanders who supported Khusrāw Khān against Ghīyāṣ al-Dīn Tuḡlūq.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 84.
- 45 See 'Iṣāmī (1938), 382f. Although Amīr-i Khusrāw ignored the Khokars in this list, he gives them a prominent role in the battle with Khusrāw Khān. See Amīr-i Khusrāw (1933), 128.
- 46 Baranī (1860-2), 427.
- 47 For one version of the events that led to the rebellion see *ibid.*, 447f. For a variant account see Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1958-71), III:652f.
- 48 *Ibid.*, III:619.
- 49 See Sijzī (1990), 242; Amīr-i Khusrāw (1978), 120; Kumar (2002); *idem* (2009 forthcoming).
- 50 For details on this subject see *idem* (2006).
- 51 See Juzjānī (1863-4), I:454; Baranī (1860-2), 33, 505.
- 52 For additional details on the backgrounds of the Khalajīs and Tuḡlūqs and the mode of dissimulation pursued by Persian chroniclers see Kumar (2009).
- 53 See Baranī (1860-2), 182f, 212f, 243.
- 54 See *ibid.*, 238.
- 55 For Baranī's portrayal of Malikah-yī Jahān as wife and mother-in-law see, *ibid.*, 196f, 221.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 245. Baranī provides the incidental information that Qadr Khān was married to sultan Naṣir al-Dīn Mahmūd's grand-daughter (see *ibid.*, 196). He does not suggest, however, that the affinal link with the old ruling family strengthened the young prince's claim to the throne.
- 57 See *ibid.*, 212, 239, 245f.
- 58 See *ibid.*, 313.
- 59 See *ibid.*, 273-6.
- 60 See Boylē (1971), 163; Doerfer (1967), I:155-9 (s.v. "vīṣīgīn"). Bosworth (1962), 237-40; *idem* (1977), 146; Golden (1990), 359; Grousset (1970), 255f.
- 61 Amīr-i Khusrāw (1933), 84.
- 62 Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1958-71), III:693.
- 63 *Ibid.*, III:663f.
- 64 *Ibid.*, III:668.
- 65 See also Qur'ān 88 (al-Ghāshiyah).
- 66 For a review of Turko-Mongol ideals of universal dominion see Turan (1955), and for a discussion of iconographic representations from the Saljuq period of the monarch,

- 'the equester and the honorific spare horse with saddle-cover' (Esin [1970], 108) see *ibid.*, 108f.
- 67 See anonymous (1965); Holt (1975), 245.
- 68 See references above and Holt (1977), 47.
- 69 al-Qalqashandī (1970–2), IV:7, cited in Holt (1975), 243.
- 70 Amīr-i Khusrāw (1933), 84.
- 71 See Baranī (1860–2), 243. Thomas (1967), 157, 169f, explains that the *panj-mān akhīār* referred to the gold coinage, *panampanam*, i.e. fractions of the *hun*, seized as plunder by 'Alā' al-Dīn in his Deccan campaigns.
- 72 Sirhindī (1932), 99. I have followed Basu's translation.
- 73 Mirzā (1935), 51f cites from Amīr-i Khusrāw, *Tuḡlqai al-sighar* (MS IOL Persian 412, fols. 50f).
- 74 Badā'ūnī (1868), I:153 cites from Amīr-i Khusrāw's *Wasī al-hayāt*.

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8 Between *dihliz* and *dār al-'adl*

Forms of outdoor and indoor royal representation at the Mamluk court in Egypt

Albrecht Fuess

Introduction

As everyone knows, engaging in outdoor activities always contains a certain element of danger. And that is just what the Mamluk sultan Qutuz (r. 657–8/1259–60) encountered when he was looking for recreation and went on a hunting party after the Mamluk victory against the Mongols at the tiresome battle of 'Ayn Jālūt in 658/1260:

The sultan [left Syria] and kept on going until he reached the Egyptian desert near al-Sālihiyya; but then he deviated from his way to go hunting with his *umarā'*. When the hunt was over, the sultan returned to the royal tent [*al-dihliz al-sulṭānī*]. There *amīr* Baybars asked that the sultan be given a wife from the Mongol prisoners and the sultan handed her over to Baybars. Baybars then took the hand of the sultan in order to kiss it. This was the sign of conspirators. To the surprise of the sultan he was struck on his shoulder with a sword by *amīr* Badr al-Dīn Bakrūt, then *amīr* Anīs pulled him down from his horse and finally *amīr* Bahādur al-Mu'izzī shot an arrow, which wounded the sultan badly. This happened on Saturday 15 Dhī 'l-Qa'da 658 [22 October 1260]. ... Afterwards the *umarā'* assembled in the royal tent and *amīr* Aqāy asked: 'Who actually killed him?' Baybars replied 'I killed him', and then Aqāy said: 'Oh Lord! Sit down on the throne and take the [sultan's] place.'¹

This story of a murder in the "royal tent" (*al-dihliz al-sulṭānī*) highlights the problem of public accessibility to Mamluk rulers, who lived among the elites of military slaves who followed the so-called "law of the Turks", meaning the murderer of the sultan succeeded him.²

For the benefit of the sultans' survival, accessibility to them had to be canalized and formalized under these circumstances to limit the danger. Yehoshua Frenkel has shown that one aspect of royal etiquette in the Mamluk period was to distance the sultan from his peers while he was at court or during travel. Upon approaching the sultan *umarā'* were ideally supposed to prostrate themselves.³ Nevertheless, despite these rules for court ceremonies, the murder of sultans still occurred. This is understandable given the fact that the position of sultan could not be inherited in